

OCTOBER 23, 1976

THE UNESCO CONFERENCE AND THE PRESS

ANNCR: A FIVE-WEEK CONFERENCE OF THE U.N. EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO) BEGINS MONDAY (BEGAN TODAY) IN NAIROBI, KENYA. NEWS ANALYST FRED GALVAN SEES IT AS PERHAPS THE MOST CRUCIAL MEETING IN UNESCO'S THIRTY-YEAR HISTORY.

VOICE: AMONG THE SEVENTY ITEMS ON THE NAIROBI UNESCO CONFERENCE'S AGENDA IS ONE THAT ALREADY IS HAVING WIDESPREAD--EVEN EXPLOSIVE--IMPACT IN MOST OF THE NEWS MEDIA OF THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES. IT IS A SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN-PACKED PROPOSAL TO EXTEND GOVERNMENT CONTROLS TO THE MASS MEDIA OF THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD. PARALLEL TO THAT EFFORT ARE FORMULAS PROPOSED BY THIRD WORLD NATIONS -- NOT AS EXTREME BUT STILL CAUSING CONCERN. THESE WOULD CREATE POOLS OF NEWS GATHERING AGENCIES ALSO UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROLS IN ASIA, AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE PROPOSALS FOR ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL CONTROLS OVER ALL NEWS MEDIA--THE THIRD WORLD FORMULAS--STEM FROM THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES' BELIEF THAT COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA FROM THE DEVELOPED WORLD DOMINATE NEWS ABOUT THEM. THESE MEDIA, THEY SAY, OFTEN DISTORT THE NEWS OR IGNORE ITS POSITIVE ASPECTS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THIS DOES HAPPEN SOMETIMES--AND NOT ONLY IN THE DEVELOPING NATIONS. BUT THE SOLUTION TO THAT PROBLEM, IT WOULD SEEM, IS NOT TO SUPPRESS THE FREE FLOW OF NEWS BUT TO EXPAND IT.

THE UNITED STATES AND SOME OTHER GOVERNMENTS, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR COMMERCIAL PRESS, SUGGEST INTENSIFIED COOPERATION BETWEEN THE MEDIA OF THE DEVELOPED WORLD AND THE NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES TO PROMOTE PROFESSIONALISM AND BETTER FACILITIES FOR DISTRIBUTING NEWS FROM THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES-- BUT WITHOUT GOVERNMENT CONTROL.

OPPONENTS OF SUCH GOVERNMENT CONTROLS ARGUE THAT THEY WOULD MATERIALLY HAMPER, IF NOT PARALYZE, FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AROUND THE WORLD. IF THE UNESCO CONFERENCE SHOULD ADOPT ANY SUCH PLAN, IT WOULD CREATE A TRAGIC IRONY. SUCH ACTION WOULD VIOLATE NOT ONLY THE UNESCO CONSTITUTION, BUT THE U.N. CHARTER, ITS UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION, AND THE HELSINKI DOCUMENT ON THE FREE FLOW OF IDEAS AND INFORMATION AMONG PEOPLES AND NATIONS. THAT PRINCIPLE IS ENDEDDED IN ALL THOSE DOCUMENTS WHICH EVEN THE SPONSORS OF THE RESTRICTIVE PROPOSALS HAVE PLEDGED TO PROMOTE.

WHAT THE UNITED STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, JAPAN AND OTHER NON-COMMUNIST DELEGATIONS IN NAIROBI ENVISION IS A CONSTRUCTIVE PLAN THAT WILL ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS. ITS AIM WOULD BE TO EXPAND, RATHER THAN LIMIT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN COUNTRIES WHERE, IN MANY CASES, IT IS ALREADY UNDER OFFICIAL RESTRICTIONS. A RECENT SURVEY BY FREEDOM HOUSE--A PRIVATE AMERICAN ORGANIZATION WHICH STUDIES WORLD HUMAN RIGHTS--HAS DETERMINED THAT ONLY ONE IN FIVE NATIONS TODAY PRACTICE FULL HUMAN RIGHTS -- INCLUDING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

ON THE ONE HAND, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF EXPANDED GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER THE MEDIA WITHIN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WOULD HAMMER OR PARALYZE EFFORTS TO REPORT NEWS OF THE THIRD WORLD. MOREOVER, GREATER RESTRICTIONS OF NEWS POSSIBLY COULD EVEN SLOW DOWN THE VERY DEVELOPMENT THE THIRD WORLD SEEKS. FOR LONG EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT A COROLLARY OF DEVELOPMENT IS THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION. ULTIMATELY, OF COURSE, UNESCO ITSELF SUFFER.